

Commander's Notes

Happy New Year! You better believe this is going to be a great year for the Steel Spike Battalion. This year we are going to accomplish some great things for the Iraqi people on behalf of the United States. If you're a forward thinker, then you also realize we're coming home this year (smile). I know – bad joke, but true.

The majority of us have come to terms with the fact of deployment. An optimistic view says we are a certain percent complete with this deployment – WOW how time flew.

Recently, I have found myself visiting your Soldiers at project sites throughout the western sector of Iraq – seven sites in all. The majority of these sites are very austere and don't have the comforts of our home bases (e.g. phones, computers, showers, hot meals, laundry service, etc). Don't fret because the Soldiers aren't complaining. For some odd reason, they seem to be happier at these sites. That's probably because they are busy from sun up to sun down. We are busy. We are providing electricity, plumbing, water, etc. We are making a difference. The sooner we get the Iraqi forces self-sufficient, the closer our Armed Forces get to coming home.

Please continue to be that positive and stabilizing force at home. Write, e-mail, send goodies, send pictures, etc. There's nothing like opening a box or envelope from home and finding pictures, letters, snacks, comforts from home, etc. The snail mail is even more important for those Soldiers located in the more austere areas. Mail takes a bit longer, but it does find its way into the right hands at just the right time. The Soldiers love it and it's nice to be able to share a piece of home. We appreciate every bit of what you send. The Family Support Group continues to be our mainstay. We appreciate every bit of your hard work and labor. Happy Valentines – love and wishes to all.

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LTC Carol L. Anderson

Sergeant Major's Notes

I hope everyone had safe and happy holidays. The Soldiers have been very busy during the last month and have made great progress in all the different projects they are currently working. I was able to get out to all of the projects and I was truly amazed at the hard work and superior performance of all the Steel Spike Soldiers.

The Battalion was able to get out the first round of Soldiers on environmental leave. One thing to remember about leave is that your Soldier can not give you an exact date of their arrival until they reach Kuwait and they have a ticket in hand. Therefore we can provide an approximate date but not the exact date of your loved ones arrival. Our goal is to get everyone who wishes to participate into the leave program, and an opportunity to go home for a well deserved rest.

You can be proud of your Soldier; I have received numerous emails of praise for their hard work and contribution to the overall mission here. The Soldiers have made a great impression on the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force and the 2nd Brigade Combat Team.

We have seven Soldiers this month who have been recommended for promotion to Sergeant and three Sergeants to Staff Sergeant.

I also would like to thank our Family Support Groups and FRG Leaders for all the hard work and support you have provided the Battalion and our Steel Spike families.

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CSM Frank Thibodeau

Executive Officer, Logistics

Hello from the lovely country of Iraq. We are in the middle of one of the wettest raining seasons in recent history. The mud is several inches deep and it sticks to everything like paste. The temperature averages around 65 degrees during the day and as low as 40 degrees in the wee hours of the morning. The rain has had some collateral effects such as localized power outages, but our electricians always get the lights and the HEAT turned back on in short order.

I have received several complaints regarding the speed or slowness of mail delivery. From door to foxhole, in a perfect world, mail takes between three and four weeks, and given the locations we are occupying that is the best case. Let me break it down so you fully understand the magnitude of this undertaking. Mail takes between 7 to 10 days to travel from the States to one of our main logistical hubs in theater. From there it travels by ground to a main base in Iraq. The mail is then separated and delivered, again by ground, to a secondary base. We have one company on a secondary base. From the secondary base, where it is again divided, it sent to a Forward Operating Base like the one we are on. This trip takes between 14 to 21 days. But wait there's more. At that point our battalion mail handlers sort the mail and we transport it by ground to our Soldiers who are working at one of our Combat Outposts that are anywhere from 10 to 200 kilometers away. This takes another week. My logistics team works very hard to ensure your Soldier gets his or her mail as fast as we can move it. By the way, that is the best case scenario.

I have had several inquiries regarding R&R Leave, a.k.a. Environmental Leave. R&R Leave is at no cost to the soldier, to any destination in the world that US personnel are allowed to travel. The Government pays for the flights from the FOB to the nearest airport to the soldier's requested leave address. (major carriers only) The soldier is responsible for any ground transportation from/to the airport to their leave address. Each soldier must provide a leave address so the flights may be booked. Our single Soldiers are using this as an opportunity to travel. We had one soldier go on leave in Africa. The 14 day leave period begins when the soldier reaches his or her final airport, the one closest to their final destination, i.e. Alexandria= Ft. Polk. Also, we can not provide an exact arrival date because it can take as much as 14 days to get in or out of Theater. It is incumbent upon the soldier to call their loved one once they have received their ticket at the departure airport in Kuwait. The Battalion does not have visibility of the exact departure dates, it varies with travel priorities and Soldiers get bumped from flights routinely. I hope this clarifies the R&R leave process.

This was a difficult month. Our Soldiers saw firsthand the ruthlessness of the enemy. During a suicide attack at a police recruiting station near our FOB over 130 perspective Iraqi volunteers were killed or wounded. The helicopters kept arriving, carrying wounded, one after the other for six hours. Time stood still. From our medics to our mechanics we all pitched in. It was a humbling event to be a part of, one that changed lives as well as saved lives. The Steel Spike Soldiers saved many lives that day and you can be proud of your Soldiers' bravery and compassion.

MAJ Al Lahood
Executive Officer

S-3, Operations

Happy New Year from Iraq! Since we last spoke your Steel Spike Soldiers have spread their footprints far and wide. You can be sure that all of our missions have value and directly support the fight against terrorists and insurgents in this volatile region of Iraq.

Operating over such a large area is keeping your engineers focused on the top priority for the operation in Iraq this year – standing up and equipping a strong, professional Iraqi police and border security force. "What does standing up a police and border security force have to do with engineers?" you ask. Well, these security forces need safe, sanitary places to live, work and train. Our staff expends every effort to make life as comfortable as possible and rotate troops in and out of hard duty locations but be assured your Steel Spike warriors are rising to the challenge of rough living and producing first class results.

In addition to the missions supporting the Iraqi forces of law and order, we continue to support our brothers in the local Infantry Brigade and the Marine Corps. I can't count the number of times in the past month that an officer from one of our sister infantry, tank or Marine Corps units has called to thank us for a quick response and job well done. Marines thanking the Army - that is a true testament to the outstanding service of YOUR Soldiers. As we head into next month I see our focus remaining unchanged. Many of YOUR Soldiers may "jump" to new locations and begin new projects but the majority of these will still be facilities in support of Iraqi security forces. As usual, we continue our support for the Infantry and Marine forces in our area and the security escort mission (TMTs) at about the same pace.

Of course, the Steel Spike Support Soldiers and Staff will continue the often thankless work of keeping the battalion fueled, fed, fixed, and armed while planning and tracking operations. In closing I'd like to take a moment to inform you of a recent event near our FOB. As many of you may be aware, a homicide bomber blew himself up during a police recruiting drive about two miles from our battalion headquarters. There were 132 total casualties and most were brought to the field hospital across the street from our battalion headquarters. Make no mistake, this was a horrific and traumatic event for anyone near it. However, despite the chaos, fear and shock of so many injured YOUR Steel Spike Soldiers rose to the occasion. Soldiers with the wrong types of blood assisted medics with the "blood drive." Dozens of other of YOUR Soldiers were on the scene assisting "Doctor Spike" and his medics, "Pastor Spike" and his ministry team or other staff members in giving first aid, monitoring communications gear, carrying litters or simply comforting Iraqi wounded as best they could despite the language barrier. To me, it is a phenomenon that epitomizes what it means to be part of the greatest fighting force on Earth. Also, two hours after the bomber blew himself up, 300 Iraqi men returned to the scene to sign up for police recruit training – yet another sign of the irreversible momentum YOUR Steel Spike Soldiers are creating on a day to day basis. Until next time God Bless and keep us in your prayers.

Hooah! And STEEL SPIKE!

MAJ R. Daren Payne
Operations Officer

913th CSE Company

Happy New Year to all our friends and family from the 913 Engineer Company! This year has started with some exciting engineering tasks for our company. 2nd platoon and some of Maintenance platoon are building an important road and outpost as part of a large construction operation. Meanwhile, the remaining few Soldiers of Headquarters and Maintenance platoon are continuing to improve living conditions around our company area. Thank you for your continued support throughout our deployment. The frequent care packages and letters continue to remind of us home and help lift our spirits.

By CPT Timothy Roberts and SPC William Doupis
913th EN CO (CSE)

HSC, 46th ECB

Happy New Year to everyone back home! HSC celebrated the New Year in style with a bonfire and a toast to our families and friends with some horrible tasting non-alcoholic champagne from the PX. This past month, in addition to ongoing mission support, HSC Soldiers put a tremendous effort into cleaning up our areas on the FOB. Daily improvements in the motorpool and headquarters areas have made things start to feel a little like home away from home. Soldiers who execute missions on other FOBs are always happy to return to "their" bed.

Your Soldiers are daily earning the respect of adjacent and supported units on the FOB and only part of this is due to our successful mission accomplishment. The rest is due to your Soldiers' compassion and ability to react with a "One Team, One Fight" mentality. HSC Soldiers selflessly responded to crises and supported several sister units through the loss of a Service Member. From giving blood at Charlie Med, to providing a firing team and unit presence at memorial services, each loss reminds us how much we all rely on each other daily for our safety and success, and how grateful we are for everyone who has helped to keep us safe. When you think of us, remember that we are not alone and pray for all those unknown Service Members also.

This month we welcome the following Soldiers into theatre and into HSC:
1LT Louck (moved from A CO)
SGT Rambin
SPC Chavez

SPC Hale
PFC Reid
PV2 Davis, S.

We were fortunate to be able to promote the following Soldiers this month:

CPL Knudson
SPC Hughes

The following Soldiers also chose to re-enlist this month and should be recognized for their continued commitment to Army service:

SGT Webster
SGT Russell

As always, thanks for your love and support back home. "ROCK STEADY! ROCK HARD!"

Happy New Year,
CPT Torres and 1SG Vasquez

A Co., 46th ECB

"Happy New Year"

Cajun Gators Drive the Spike! The team is quickly approaching the end of its first major project and is doing so in style. This project consisted of the construction of a large camp that will serve as a life support location for Iraqi military personnel, and our team rose to the occasion on this collaborative project that was shared between Navy Seabees and Army Soldiers. Each branch was able to work none stop in an austere locality and stay on schedule. By virtue of different standing operating procedures, both groups used this project to learn from each other. Of course there were healthy spurts of competition on just who possessed the best carpentry, electrical, plumbing, and earth moving skills, but the energy was appropriately directed to the project which received numerous accolades for the quality and detail of the craftsmanship which distinguishes this project from others. More importantly, by the completion of the project new found Engineer friends were developed—something that will exist long after this deployment is over.

Supporting this project proved logistically challenging at all levels, but in the grand scheme of things we managed to overcome many obstacles. As you are aware, one of the difficulties that led to much frustration on everyone's part was the timely delivery of mail. This situation was amplified all the more because of the Christmas holiday season. Added together with the usual delay from the states, the mail and multiple logistical items began long journeys, some taking weeks, to arrive at the hubs, then several days awaiting armed escorts to project sites. In part, leadership expected some issues to occur based on lessons learned from previous deployments as which was relayed to our Soldiers in advance. We assure you that all attempts were made to minimize the shortfalls that impacted not just Cajun Gators, but all deployed service members, of every branch of the military, supporting the efforts here in Iraq.

The combined efforts of the FRG are continuing to energize the team here. You are truly serving as a "life-line for the troops." The personalized greeting cards and video of family members refueled us here and brought genuine happiness and cheers to everyone. The Soldiers and leaders alike, positively, absolutely enjoy (hint, hint) seeing live footage of you all. It solidifies the phone calls and letters and assures us here that everyone on that end is doing well. We realize that this goes both ways and are preparing to do a VTC in the in the upcoming weeks. We encourage everyone to view recent photos using one of the Spike Battalion communication venues, the "My Family Photo," can be accessed via email.

In closing, your Soldiers are doing extra-ordinary things over here in support of the mission. They are committed to mission success regardless of what situation or condition in which they find themselves in. A large part of that is attributed to what you have done and continue to do in support of them. Cajun Gator leadership appreciates the thoughtfulness and seemingly limitless efforts that you take to reach out to all of the Soldiers on the team, fortifying camaraderie and unit cohesion. Cajun rear-detachment, family members, and friends, thank you for being the glue that holds this awesome unit together.

Thank you,
CPT Dallas and 1SG Lantz
Cajun (Gator) 6 & 7

B Co., 46th ECB

Dear Friends and Families of the BEAST,

The new year is here, and its hard to believe that its been a whole month since we've sent you an update. Time is definitely flying by here, and the main reason for that is the BEAST has been constantly busy with multiple construction projects.

2nd Platoon has been hard at work in several different locations. They still have a team of Soldiers, led by SSG McDonald, east of our FOB, continuing with their mission of electrical and plumbing renovations and cleanup at the bases there. Their hard work allowed a smooth transition of the bases to Iraqi Forces, who in turn were able to provide security for their city during the December nation wide elections. 2nd Platoon's success there directly affected Iraq's procession towards becoming a free democratic nation! Soldiers from 2nd Platoon are ready to leave there, since they took over the project in late November. They should complete that project soon!

2nd Platoon, led by 1LT Boyle, has recently begun a concrete maintenance pad project at a nearby U.S. base. Project conditions haven't been ideal lately, as it's rained numerous days in the past couple weeks, making the ground really muddy. But they continue to chug away, with EM preparing the ground for them and clearing away debris with their heavy equipment. When they are complete, the Marines will have a concrete pad to stage equipment. 2nd platoon is also building a small building for the 46th, which will be a soils testing lab to support construction operations.

EM platoon is also constantly at work, both on and off of our Camp. They are playing a key role in the maintenance pad construction, clearing debris with a loader and bulldozer, cutting and filling with a Grader and preparing the ground for concrete placement with a vibratory roller. They've also sent a team to our east to receive gravel and grade, roll and compact it in the construction of an equipment staging lot.

These projects, along with numerous FOB taskings, keep them busy. EM platoon, though short on Soldiers, continually completes the mission at hand, and with excellence.

They have numerous convoy escort missions throughout each week, sometimes being on the road for several days at a time.

BEAST Family, Friends, and Sweet Tea...we miss you!! Keep us in your thoughts and prayers, and we will see ya'll soon...

Happy New Year!
CPT Himes and 1SG Scullion

Chaplain's Corner

What a great month it has been since the last newsletter! I am so amazed at how resilient the Soldiers have been. In fact, it is one of the reasons I love being around Soldiers, they can do anything - especially engineers. Our Soldiers can build buildings, pave roads, operate bulldozers, fix trucks, repair generators, doctor wounds, weld steel, fix computers, and hundreds of other amazing things. I cannot even begin to tell you all the things these Soldiers are capable of doing. But the thing that really impressed me over the last several weeks was how they made Christmas special even though they did not have much to work with. Once again, it was all about attitude. They could have complained about not being able to be with their families for Christmas, or they could have sat around being Scrooge-like over being so far from home, but they didn't. They made Christmas special anyway. Actually, even though we all wished like crazy we were at home with all of you, Christmas was actually kind of fun. You all sent so many wonderful Christmas care packages there was plenty to share. We had a great bonfire and sang Christmas carols for a long time. We drank hot chocolate and coffee in the cold, dark, Iraqi night. We missed you, but we enjoyed Christmas. We had so much fun we did it again the next week for New Years. We enjoyed another great fire and this time we popped the corks on some cheap, fake champagne. We sort of made something out of nothing. That is, I have found, what engineers do -- they take junk and make something great -- and our Soldiers are dang good at it! It makes me respect them more than ever and I admire all of them very much.

This leads me to this month's Ministry Moment... In much the same way, those of you waiting for us back home are a lot like the 46th Engineers you are supporting. You too are doing very well at taking a tough situation and making something good out of it. I know what you are doing is not easy. Being both mama and daddy is very hard. Decisions that you normally make together, you now have to make alone. And of course the car, the washing machine, and the TV conveniently waited to break down until after we left. And sleeping alone each night is harder than we thought it would be. But you are hanging tough and making good things happen. You are learning, growing, and are becoming stronger. You are telling us how proud you are of us, but it's us who are so proud of you! You are doing a great job with some pretty hard junk. You haven't quit and even though you would like things to be different, you drive on knowing that what you are doing is important and is making a difference in other people's lives. You know what that makes you? An honorary engineer! You have the right stuff to take almost nothing and turn it into something that matters. For that you deserve to be an honorary engineer!

We are so proud of you all. Thank you for your love, support, and prayers. I promise you, you have ours too. You deserve them.

Until next time - keep the faith baby, not the baby faith.

God bless,
Chaplain Temkin